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SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA AND DRL/NESCA
NSC FOR KUMAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/02/2029
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: GOE HOLDS PROMINENT BLOGGER AT AIRPORT, SEIZES HIS
LAPTOP

REF: A. CAIRO 1182
[1](#)B. CAIRO 544
[1](#)C. CAIRO 243
[1](#)D. 07 CAIRO 3214

Classified By: Economic-Political Minister-Counselor
William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Blogger Wael Abbas told us GOE passport and customs officials held him at Cairo International Airport for 13 hours on June 30 upon his return from a conference in Sweden. Abbas said the officials did not ask him any questions, but searched him very thoroughly in what amounted "almost to a strip search." Abbas noted that the officials told him they were searching for illegal items he might be smuggling into Egypt. He said they went through his wallet, and took his papers from the conference presumably to make photocopies before returning them. Abbas told us the officials seized his laptop and did not return it before he was released.

[1](#)2. (C) According to Abbas, one official told him in confidence that he was held because MOI State Security Investigative Services (SSIS) had placed him on a watch list. This official said customs received orders from SSIS to seize his laptop. Abbas noted that he had never been held for this length of time previously, and he speculated that SSIS was responding to critical comments he made about the GOE at the conference. Abbas said he understood that two ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) officials who were also there reported his remarks to the GOE. On July 2, Abbas posted on his blog a photo of himself being held at the airport and approximately 20 articles and letters on the incident from the media and supportive NGOs. He promised to blog about the experience after resting.

[1](#)3. (C) Member of the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights and Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) Secretary-General Hafez Abu Seada told us EOHR lawyers are acting on Abbas' behalf to retrieve the laptop. Abu Seada said the copyright division of the Cairo police department is holding the laptop, and that the GOE may take legal action against Abbas for software copyright infringement. According to Abu Seada, the GOE is trying to threaten Abbas and "send a strong message" to all bloggers. On July 2, we expressed concern over Abbas' treatment to MFA Deputy Director for Human Rights Omar Shalaby, and called for the return of his laptop. Shalaby said he would get back to us with any substantive response.

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: The harassment and mistreatment of one of Egypt's most prominent bloggers is probably intended to show Abbas and other bloggers and activists that the GOE reserves the right to retaliate against public criticism it finds particularly embarrassing. For years, Abbas has posted photos of police brutality and abuse without the GOE

responding by holding him in custody (reftels), but it appears that his negative public remarks at an international conference have crossed a red-line. Abbas has accused SSIS of pressuring news organizations to fire himself and other bloggers in the past (ref B). The GOE's June 30 actions constitute a more direct and confrontational approach to intimidation.

SCOBAY